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ORATION OF CASSIUS MARCELLUS CLAY

BEFORE

THE MAUMEE VALLEY HISTORICAL AND MONUMENTAL
ASSOCIATION, OF TOLEDO, OHIO,

AT

Put-In-Bay Island, Lake Erie, on the 10th of September, 1891

THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE CAPTURE OF THE BRITISH
FLEET BY OLIVER HAZARD PERRY.

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ORATION

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MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES, AND GENTLEMEN:

The birth, maturity, and death of nations are the basis of history, and Pope well says, "The noblest study of mankind is man." The Almighty God has given to man—the head of creation—no higher quality than courage,—held in common with the beasts that, by physical impulse, attack and defend to the death,—but in addition thereto that moral courage which is not shared by the lower animals, which is ready to meet death in aid of good to mankind. Not those who have died to destroy but to save nations are to be honored; and yet more worthy of immortality is he who not only saves a nation's life, but its liberties. There is no doubt evolution in nature is eternal advance to a higher plane of perfection. As the dying vegetation fertilizes the soil for a superior growth, so the death of nations gives the material for higher civilization. Thus the liberties of nations rise in new vestments of glory from age to age. In 1776 England was the most advanced of all the ages in constitutional

liberty, but when we went to war "for no taxation without representation," and created a new nation, we reached a higher plane in the advance of civilization.

Thomas Jefferson was more than the author of our Declaration of Independence in 1776; he more than any American laid down the basis of our popular liberty. On this day, standing on ground consecrated by him to freedom from chattel slavery forever, his name should be first mentioned among our moral heroes. The grand result of an independent nation was not only equal taxation, but equality of property and religion by the abolition of primogeniture and the church-and-state theory of Great Britain, which principles have for the first time in history been practically made the bed-rock by Kentucky on August 3, 1891, of her new constitution, by a majority of 139,415.

England, with Lord Chatham (William Pitt) and a few of her greatest and noblest intellects in favor of our independence, made peace on December 27, 1783. But she submitted with ill grace to fate. She claimed the right of inalienable allegiance, and stopped our vessels on the high seas, and took her once subjects, though now naturalized citizens of the United States, against our protest. They took not only once British subjects, but native-born Americans, and held them in naval service or in bonds and imprisonment. The war continuing between France and herself, she declared all the French coast on the Atlantic to be in a state of blockade, which, being unable to enforce, was contrary to the laws of nations. Napoleon retaliated, and declared November 3, 1806—known as the Berlin decree—all England

and the British Islands blockaded. Finally England decreed that all vessels trading with France should touch the English coast and get a permit, or be confiscated if caught on the seas. These intolerable usurpations at length drove the United States, under the leadership of Henry Clay, to declare war with England, June 12, 1812,—James Madison being President. From the time Daniel Boone entered Kentucky with Findley, in 1769, there was unceasing war with the Indians, whose friendship England cultivated from their Canadian possessions. Time allows only mention of incidents most nearly connected with our celebration,—omitting the great names of Anthony Wayne, Daniel Boone, George Rogers Clarke, and Lewis Clarke.

William Henry Harrison was appointed Governor of the Northwestern Territory, including Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin,—having done much civil and military service well known to history. On the 5th of November, 1811, Governor Harrison marched with some regulars and militia—mostly Kentuckians, 800 strong—upon the Prophet's town (the brother of Tecumseh), on the Tippecanoe River, in Indiana, where he was intrenched. The Indians were defeated and dispersed, their leader, the Prophet, being killed. This overawed the Indians, who were in almost entire possession of the whole Territory, but war with England being imminent, they refused a peace. William Hull, a native of Connecticut, and a distinguished soldier of the revolution, was made, by Jefferson, Governor of Michigan in 1805. He remained in office till 1812, when he was made brigadier-general and commander of the Northwestern Army, by President James

Madison. Marching with his army—with orders to conquer Western Canada—to Detroit, through the wilderness, he there heard of the fall of Michilimackinac, on Lake Huron,—which set loose all the Indians in the Northwestern Territory upon him. He attempted a retreat through Canada, but, being opposed, he recrossed into Michigan, and surrendered his whole army, Detroit, and the Northwestern Territory to General Brock, of the English army. This filled the whole West with indignation, and he was everywhere declared a traitor to his country. I remember when I was a child hearing one of our colored slaves—Scott—singing a doggerel, of which I can only recall a few words:

“ We’ve left our plantations,
 Our friends and relations,
 And flew to the war as the friend of the brave ;
 But Hull, you old traitor,
 You out-east of nature,
 Your conscience condemns you
 As long as you live.”

I dwell upon this event to say that Hull was no doubt a sincere patriot, and did his best for his men and his country, and surrendered only when contest was death.

This same Scott Clay, when I lay ill in 1845, amid the murderous threats of my enemies, the opponents of liberation, appeared in my bedroom, having come twenty miles to Lexington, Ky., on foot, from my home at White Hall, and, on being questioned, said, “ I come to defend you.”

“ But,” said I, “ Scott, you are but one man, and thousands to-day will surround us.”

“Then,” said he, “I will die in that door before they shall kill you.”

On the declaration of war, June 12, 1812, the military spirit was high in Kentucky. Seven thousand volunteers offered themselves to the government, and 1500 were under General Hopkins, on the march to Detroit through the wilderness, when they heard of the surrender of Detroit. They at once returned home, or joined General Harrison, against the protest of General Hopkins.

It would have been well if Napoleon, who was about this time marching upon Moscow, had followed the example of these Kentuckians, and after his real defeat at Borodino had returned to France.

On the 1st day of January, 1813, the Northwest Army, under Brigadier-General Harrison, rested, with the left wing, commanded by General Winchester at Fort Defiance, on the Maumee River, and the right wing under the commander-in-chief at Upper Sandusky. Detroit being the objective point of attack, Winchester was ordered to march with his brigade of Kentuckians and regulars, commanded on the left by Colonel Lewis, to reach the rapids and await Harrison's arrival. But Winchester, on the 14th, hearing of the weak garrison of Frenchtown, on the river Raisin, in Canada, detached Colonel Lewis to capture it, which was done on the 18th of January, 1813.

Winchester, hearing of the capture, marched to the support of Lewis, refused to enter his pickets, and camped his regiment on the plains outside, because he would not take post on the left of Lewis,—military etiquette ordering,—and he slept at a farm-house a mile distant from Colonel Wells's regi-

ment. A British force, under General Proctor, marched with regulars and Indians in the night of the 21st, assaulted Lewis's fort, and were repulsed with great slaughter. They then turned on Wells's regiment and cut it to pieces, taking many prisoners, among them Colonel Wells himself. The whole British force with six field-pieces was turned upon Lewis, who surrendered under promise of the protection of civilized warfare. The generals, colonels, and other officers and men were saved as stipulated, but all the wounded were massacred in Frenchtown. There was no guard left, and two houses full of the wounded were burned.

Since the declaration of war, defeat on all the scenes which belong to this address followed our armies. General Harrison, after the battle of Frenchtown, was compelled to abandon the recapture of Detroit, and to stand on the defensive. On the south bank of the Maumee River he built a strong fort of logs set on end, with salient block-houses at the angles, covering seven acres of land. It was proof against musket and rifle-balls and light artillery, but was not secure against heavy guns.

Here he awaited reinforcements, called for through the authority of the general government. This fort was named Meigs, in honor of the then Governor of Ohio. Governor Isaac Shelby, the hero of King's Mountain in the Revolutionary War, was then filling his second term of office as Governor of Kentucky, succeeding General Charles Scott, another veteran and Indian fighter.

My father, Green Clay, was born in Powhattan County, Virginia, August 14, 1757; migrated into

Kentucky about the year 1776; fought the British and their allies, the Indians, during the Revolutionary War till the peace in 1783; was a delegate of the District of Kentucky before it was made a State, in the Virginia General Assembly; was a member from Kentucky of the convention of 1788, and voted for the Federal Constitution of 1789 ("D. Vir. Con. 1788," volumes ii.), and was a member of the convention of 1799 ("Collins's Kentucky," 1847, and "New American Encyclopædia," p. 307, vol. v.); was then major-general and commander, next to the Governor, of the Kentucky militia at the declaration of war in 1812; was made brigadier-general by commission anew, and put in command of the four regiments of volunteers, consisting of 3000 men, under the command of Colonels Dudley, Boswell, Cox, and Caldwell.

On the 12th of April, 1813, the advanced guard reached Fort Meigs; and on the 25th the British flotilla, having on board the battering cannon, were at the mouth of the Maumee River, two miles below, where the gun-boats landed, and finally placed their artillery on land opposite the Americans, and had batteries thrown up on both sides of the fort,—on the right and left banks of the Maumee River. A horde of Indians, commanded by Tecumseh, attended the British as allies, in all 3000 strong. On the first of May a heavy fire was opened by the British, and feebly returned by Harrison, mostly from balls picked up from the guns of the enemy.

On the 4th of May General Clay reached Fort Defiance, on the Maumee River, with the remainder of the brigade, 2000 men, 1000 having been sent forward before the investment by the British and Indians. General Harrison left orders at Defiance for

General Clay to unload his boats on his arrival there, and, making forced marches, to cut his way through the enemy into Fort Meigs. But my father, like every true soldier, while observing the main purpose of the order to the letter, being an old Indian fighter, unloaded his boats, put up additional timbers on the gunwales of the flat-boats, and descended the river, without the loss of a man. In the mean time he sent orders by Major D. Trimble, with five men, to inform General Harrison of his movements. The gallant major in the late afternoon, launching his canoe, reached Fort Meigs before daylight, and delivered his orders. General Harrison, with the rapid resolution of military genius, despatched by Captain Hamilton an order to Clay (I quote from Collins), "to land 800 men upon the northern shore, opposite the fort, to carry the British batteries there placed; to spike the cannon and destroy the carriages, after which they were immediately to regain their boats and cross over to the fort." Hamilton, ascending the river in a canoe, delivered the orders to Clay. But he, with that sagacity which distinguished his life, sent Hamilton to deliver Harrison's order to Colonel William Dudley himself. Dudley captured the batteries and filled his orders literally,—all but the important one. Led off by the artifices of Indian warfare, he was killed with all his force, save about 150 men. Clay landed his 1200 men. In a letter dated at Fort Meigs, July 8, 1813, to Micajah Harrison, of Kentucky ("Life of Cassius Marcellus Clay," vol. i. p. 44), he writes:

"On the day of the action, Major David Trimble accompanied me to cover the retreat of the remnant of Colonel Dudley's regiment, and behaved with

great coolness and gallantry. . . . Here the Kentuckians drove Tecumseh where the hottest battle was fought, and then he crossed the river, and with their whole force overthrew Colonel Dudley.”

Acting under General Harrison’s orders, on May 5, 1813, with 1200 men, Green Clay, commanding the left wing, defeated the immortal Tecumseh and the British forces, 3000 men, in open daylight, drove them over the river, and saved 150 Kentucky soldiers, the remnant of his brigade, from death. This was the first real victory, within the lines of this address, since the declaration of war, January 12, 1812.

When war was declared, Green Clay was major-general of the Kentucky militia. Then every man was bound to perform military service. His rightful rank was major-general, but he was reduced to a brigadier-general, and so commissioned by Governor Shelby.

William Henry Harrison was made a brigadier-general by Governor Charles Scott, April 25, 1812, which gave him the right of command, when they met, over my father. This was all right. General Harrison was a trained soldier, and the commander-in-chief over the Indiana Territory, and was made brigadier September 17, 1812, and afterwards major-general by the Federal government. Thus he would have ranked General Clay by seniority. Now our slanderers say this was done in depreciation of General Clay. If it was done in a patriotic spirit, what shall be said of those ignoble calumniators? If it was done in personal enmity to Clay, how he silenced his detractors by submitting to wrong with such patriotic self-sacrifice! No jealousy at least existed between General Harrison and himself. He

was commended by the fact that he was made, after the siege of Fort Meigs was raised, commander-in-chief. There were four regiments of regular troops, two companies of engineers and artillery, two regiments of Ohio militia, the Pittsburg and Petersburg volunteers, a corps of riflemen and cavalry, and Clay's brigade of Kentucky militia. So soon as the siege was abandoned, General Harrison moved on north with a view of invading Canada, as soon as his fleet was ready for action.

In the mean time, Generals Proctor and Tecumseh returned to the attack on Fort Meigs with an increased force, and continued it till about July, 1813. But General Clay so obstinately resisted that the siege was finally raised once more. In this last attack 200 men and officers were killed and wounded, and about six wagon-loads of balls and unexploded shells were picked up and utilized by the Americans. (Clay's letter to Micajah Harrison, July 8, 1813.) In their retreat the enemy attempted to capture by storm an out-post, Fort Stevenson, with one hundred and fifty Kentuckians, commanded by Captain George Croghan, also a Kentuckian. The fort was a simple stockade without salient angles, or block-houses on the corners, and being unable to resist cannon, he was ordered to abandon the post and retreat into Fort Meigs; but being too late, he stood his ground and defended himself most gallantly against the enemy. The Indians did not like sieges. Neither did they like Kentuckians! He was brevetted at once lieutenant-colonel, and he distinguished himself in after-years. On Harrison's return to Fort Meigs, he, by special order, thanked General Clay for his gallant defence, and his brigade, having served

their time of enlistment, returned home. But my father, by General Harrison's invitation, attended the army to Detroit, and thence returned to his home in Kentucky.

The Federal government at last awakened to the absolute necessity of commanding the lakes before making further advance in the conquest of Canada. Oliver Hazard Perry was born in Newport, R.I., January, 1785, and died at the Island of Trinidad, August 23, 1819. In 1813 he was a lieutenant in the United States navy, commanding a division of gun-boats off his native coast. Fired by patriotic ambition, he asked to be transferred to the command of Commodore Isaac Chauncey, the chief naval officer of all the lakes, being then on Lake Ontario. Chauncey deputed Lieutenant Perry, already famous in naval warfare, to build on Lake Erie a navy out of green timber equal to the capture of the British squadron then dominating those waters. This Perry set about with great enthusiasm and skill, aided by the experts from the commodore's fleet. Absent for a time to assist his chief in the capture of Fort George, on Lake Ontario, he returned to his work. Taking advantage of Barclay's temporary absence from observing him at Erie, Pa., he lifted the larger vessels on rafts of logs over the shallows and off Put-In-Bay was prepared for the great action of September 10, 1813. Commodore Barclay had six boats and 63 guns and 502 officers and men. Perry had nine vessels with 54 guns and 490 officers and men. The limits of this occasion will not allow me to go into this, one of the most glorious battles in the world's history. It is enough that Perry won the battle and captured all the British ships and their

crews. This was the fall of Troy and our task is finished. The capture of the foe gave us the command of the lakes, and virtually closed the war in the Northwest. Detroit and Malden were evacuated at once, and our rule of the Northwest Territory restored. The Kentucky troops, released from the forts, were anxious to join Perry, but only 150 by lot were taken, who served on the fleet as mariners, and after fighting the battle of the Thames, October 5, 1813, returned home. My father accompanied General Harrison to the seat of the Lake war, was on the captured fleet, and embarked for Detroit, which was already evacuated, and was placed by Harrison under General McArthur, and then he followed his men to his Kentucky home. The battle of the Thames excited but little interest after the immortal victory of September 10, as the sun obscures all minor lights. But here Tecumseh made his last stand, and by a dismounted squad of horsemen, led by Colonel Richard M. Johnson, afterwards elected Vice-President of the United States, fell dead on the field of battle. The contest about the birthplace of Homer was never more fiercely waged than about "Who killed Tecumseh?"

On the 30th day of December, 1843, there was a great meeting of the friends of slave-holding Texas annexation, at the White Sulphur Springs, in Scott County, Ky., Johnson's home, at which he was the principal speaker. I offered opposing resolutions, and followed him in a speech ("Life of C. M. Clay," 1 vol., by Horace Greeley, Harper Bros., New York, 1848). The gallant colonel, wearing a red waistcoat after the fashion of the Jeffersonians of earlier days, was at first startled by the question (from some opponent,

probably) in the audience, "Who killed Tecumseh?" but, recovering, looked steadily at his inquisitor and replied, "I do not say I killed Tecumseh, but if I did not kill him, say, who did kill him?" This sensible rejoinder silenced the batteries of his opponent, as no one could say who did kill him. The good and brave soldier told but the truth, for had he said, "I killed him," that would have settled the question forever. He had killed all the Indians about him and fell badly wounded. Neither he nor any one else recognized the great warrior, till some Indians, after the battle, pointed him out to the Americans. But his followers knew of his death, and holding out after the British left in flight the field, they fled when their leader was no more.

Some of my opponents badgering me about the matter, I said it did not matter who killed Tecumseh, as Green Clay had whipped him twice before under the command of William Henry Harrison. Tecumseh was the most distinguished man of all the tribes of Indians on the North American continent. He had great intelligence as well as bravery and humanity. At Dudley's defeat, when the prisoners were being massacred in Proctor's presence, or by his complicity, Tecumseh rushed in and with great indignation stopped the slaughter. Proctor knew very well what his fate would be if ever he was caught by the Kentuckians, and he took care to secure himself by cowardly retreats. As soon as Perry's victory secured the possibility of intercepting his escape, he abandoned Detroit and Malden, and the general opinion is that the gallant Tecumseh forced him to make a stand at the Thames, where he showed not only immortal courage, but

great genius in the selection of the field of battle. So every lover of home and humanity must shed a tear over the great spirit which gave all for the defence of his hearthstone and his country. . . . And here the scene changes South to New Orleans.

The British, despairing of defence in the North, on the overthrow of Napoleon, emptied their victorious soldiers, under the command of Sir Edward Pakenham, below New Orleans, on the left bank of the Mississippi, two miles from the city.

The great battle of the war, after the varying results in the East, was fought on the 8th of January, 1815, after the peace which was made December 24, 1814, between Great Britain and America, but was unknown to Jackson till after his victory. The Kentuckians, relieved from the Northern service, eagerly flocked to Jackson's standard, at New Orleans, La.

Here once more yet ring in my ears the old chants in commemoration of this, the most splendid victory in our annals, on land,—

He led us down to Cypress swamp,
The land was low and murky ;
There stood John Bull in martial pomp,
But here stood old Kentucky.

CHORUS—Old Kentucky,—the hunters of Kentucky !
They'd have our gals and cotton bags in spite of
Old Kentucky.

Thus closed the war with the star-spangled banner flaming with immortal light ! We had proved our soldiers the foremost of nations in prowess on land and sea.

Nothing was said in the treaty of peace about "free trade or sailors' rights," but they were made

secure all the same. No longer our seamen can be seized on the high seas, and citizens once standing under the stars and stripes are safe from enforced allegiance to the rulers of their native lands. Thus is progress lifted to a higher plane by this war, and the evolution of liberty and civilization are once more triumphant.

The peace of Ghent, December 24, 1814, was represented in part by John Quincy Adams, on the Federal side, and the Republicans by Henry Clay, the one from the North, the other from the South. The great battles were fought at Lake Erie by Perry, an Eastern and Northern man, and by Andrew Jackson, in the South and West. They were both born in the East, but mostly supported by Western soldiers. These, then, are eminently national triumphs, and should be commemorated by all parties and all sections of our common country.

While the most lasting monuments are not built of marble or bronze, these last are auxiliary to the heart-felt gratitude of all posterity. Let, then, these sacred grounds be set apart for the education of our children, as an everlasting stimulation to patriotic deeds. First inscribed on this temple of fame, let the name of God be conspicuously eminent; then the foremost of our heroes by land and sea moulded in bronze be set on granite bases; then last, but not least, the words of Lincoln be engraved, which will endure longer than the bronze or the granite: "A government of the people, by the people, and for the people."

NOTES.

My authority for the statements made by me are from the living witnesses Green Clay, John Speed Smith, of Harrison's staff, and others.

. . . There is, in the Library of the Maumee Historical and Monumental Association, a written order-book by Captain Daniel Cushings, Heavy Artillery, U.S.A., April 1, 1813. The British battery on the north side of the Maumee had (4) four 32-pounders and a mortar-battery of (2) two guns. The British battery on the south side was taken on the 5th by the Americans. The United States had five batteries in the fort,—number of guns not given. . . . In general order, May 9, 1813, General Harrison writes: "The general gives his thanks to Brigadier-General Clay for the promptitude with which the detachment of his brigade was landed, and the assistance given by him for forming them for the attack on the left." Signed John O'Fallon, assistant acting adjutant-general.

. . . It would then, from these data, appear that Clay's brigade was the whole of the left wing, as Harrison had only 2250 men at the time. It is not probable that less than a thousand were left to man the fort and 1200 to form the right wing. So General Clay fought that battle with Tecumseh, and drove him over the river unaided by the right wing engaged in the capture of the South battery.

. . . My father's motive for sending Harrison's order to Colonel Dudley was obvious. The Kentuckians had been used to fight without regular organizations. Their leaders were generally nominated for the occasion, and had but little authority over their associates. Green Clay's knowledge of these facts either led him to doubt the propriety of such order to any but regulars, or he was guarding against his enemies in the rear.

. . . Proctor knew well that the Kentuckians would not fail to avenge his crimes against civilization. He could easily have battered down Fort Stevenson, for he had (2) two 32-pounders and other guns, but, failing in the assault, he feared his communications with Canada might be cut off, himself taken and killed! So he not only abandoned Detroit and Malden, but at the battle of the Thames he fled before the Indians were routed. He was pursued with such determination by the Kentuckians that his personal camp baggage was captured in the flight.

. . . Ex-President R. B. Hayes presided, and J. K. Hamilton, mayor of Toledo, was secretary of the celebration.





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